



METAMORPHOSIS: REACTIVATION IN DEVELOPMENT OF UNNAMED NARRATOR IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S SURFACING

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood stands as a beacon of creative versatility in the realm of literature, boasting a distinguished and internationally renowned reputation. She holds a place among the most acclaimed authors of fiction in recent memory. Atwood's second published novel, "Surfacing," not only showcases her prowess in prose but also delves into thematic concerns reminiscent of her poetic works. In "Surfacing," Atwood masterfully crafts a narrative that follows a woman burdened by the toll of her past marital experiences. However, what sets this novel apart is the protagonist's transformative journey from a state of psychic and emotional paralysis to one of unified agency. This progression carries with it a potent mythic dimension, a depth that distinguishes it from her earlier works. Through evocative prose, Atwood paints a portrait of resilience and self-discovery that resonates profoundly with readers, cementing her status as a literary luminary. Metamorphosis (Transformation) is widely used themes in literature and its situations are varied in different works. The cause for transformation is diverse and can be portrayed in numerous ways. The present research paper is present the role of Metamorphosis (transformation) in the context of Margaret Atwood's Surfacing. The purpose of this research paper is to analyze the unnamed narrator's the way of Metamorphosis. In 'Surfacing' the narrator undergoes both physical and psychological metamorphosis, navigating a complex terrain of self-discovery and identity. The return to her childhood home in the remote Canadian wilderness serves as a catalyst for her transformation, prompting a reconnection with her past and a confrontation with suppressed memories and emotions. This journey parallels an internal metamorphosis as she sheds societal expectations and embraces her true self. Additionally, the narrator's interactions with the natural world play a crucial role in her transformation. Immersed in the wilderness, she becomes attuned to its rhythms, blurring the boundaries between herself and her environment. This fusion symbolizes a profound metamorphosis, as she transcends human constraints and embraces a more primal existence. 'Surfacing' offers a compelling exploration of Metamorphosis through the lens of the unnamed narrator's journey. Atwood's nuanced portrayal of transformation invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of identity and introspection, making 'Surfacing' a timeless and thought-provoking work of literature."

KEYWORDS: Metamorphosis, Transformation, Self-Admiration, Self-Identity

INTRODUCTION

Throughout 'Surfacing,' Atwood intertwines the themes of Metamorphosis, inviting readers to explore the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and introspection. As she confronts her inner demons and navigates the wilderness of her own mind, she seeks to reconcile the fragmented pieces of her identity and find meaning in her existence. Alongside her transformation, the narrator grapples with issues of self-admiration and narcissism. Her obsessive focus on her appearance, relationships, and past achievements reflects deep-seated insecurities and a desire for validation. Isolated in the wilderness, she confronts her distorted self-image and navigates the complexities of her own psyche.

According to Branko Gorjup (2006: 130), the theme of metamorphosis is connected to the themes of female identity, Canadian identity, nature and duality as the characteristics of the themes initiate the metamorphosis of the main character. (2006: 130).The transforming journey of the anonymous narrator in Surfacing is examined in this paper's empirical trip. The goal is to learn what triggers the protagonist's metamorphosis, what she goes through during it, and how her journey of

rebirth eventually alters her as a person. As the traits of the themes start the main character's transformation, the themes of metamorphosis are related to those of feminine identity, Canadian identity, nature, and dualism. A person's search for strength and identity is the central theme of the book Surfacing. Examine the Surfacing from the perspective of a woman's "rebirth journey". Through metamorphosis and transformation, the objective is accomplished. To go through rebirth in Atwood's Surfacing the protagonist must pay attention to her body.

In Surfacing, metamorphosis refers to organic growth that is promoted by the natural world. After learning of her father's absence, the unnamed narrator of the Surfacing drives to her childhood home in Quebec at the start of the novel. Along with her boyfriend Joe, she is accompanied by a married couple named David and Anna. It is evident right away that the narrator has experienced trauma in the city, despite her best efforts to repress some unpleasant memories. This is made clear in the scene where the narrator's face gets injured as she bites into the 14-cone out of the blue while the narrator is eating ice cream. "If it hurts, invent a different pain," she advises (Atwood 1979: 9), implying that she exploits her physical agony as a means

of relieving her emotional pain. The statement, "I've to keep myself from telling that story," which emerges in the midst of her compliances of the surroundings, is another sign of her anxiety. She also discusses her ex-husband, who was a kind man before they were wedded but came different person. The narrator claims that they also had a child, but that formerly she got disassociated, she disowned him. This relationship is a reflection of her victimization complex, which is reflective of her double thinking. Another illustration of this is her belief that Americans, in discrepancy to Canadians, are evil and seek to destroy Canada's natural terrain "They spread themselves like a contagion," the narrator believes (Atwood 1979 123). Because of her failed marriage the narrator seems to be emotionally numb. She's rather indifferent towards Joe, her swain. They live together and Joe has expressed his love towards the narrator, but she's unfit to repay. She finds only Joe's physical appearance to be appealing. She says: "Everything I value about him seems to be physical: the rest is either unknown disagreeable or ridiculous" (Atwood 1979: 51).

Gilbert and Gubar showed how the creativity of female writers—which had been suppressed by patriarchal forces in society—is reflected in this image of a heroine. This suppressed inventiveness was released through the fabrication of a madwoman, allowing female authors to criticize their own socially oppressed status in plain sight (Federico 2). She also calls Joe gorgeous at one point and compares his appearance to that of a buffalo. This could be an indication that the narrator is more at ease around others who are less like themselves. Her connection with Anna is another instance of her emotional detachment. Despite having only known Anna for two months, she describes her as her closest friend. Since Anna does not know about the protagonist's past and does not discuss her marital issues with her, they do not have a strong bond. Additionally, they have contrasting perspectives on women's responsibilities; the heroine is more independent and disdainful of Joe's wishes, whereas Anna conceals her own needs and wishes in an effort to satisfy her spouse.

The narrator also feels cut off from society. She believes that men who rule women through language, birth, marriage, and sex alienate women. David is presented as a stereotypical male oppressor of women in the novel. At first, the narrator believes that David and Anna's marriage is ideal and it gives her some hope for successful marriages. But as the narrative goes on, she comes to see that the marriage is unhealthy and that David is using it as a means of controlling Anna since if she were to leave him, she would have nothing left. The narrator also believes that males deceive women by using words to declare their love for them or to reinforce their worth. She feels that language is superfluous and misleading. Additionally, David uses words to undermine Anna's self-worth and make her feel horrible, which makes her less inclined to leave.

The narrator remembers her youth while looking through some old scrapbooks she found at her father's house. She recalls her mother as a symbol of nature and as a kind person.

But unlike her mother, her father was a scientist, which made

him more sensible. In contrast to her mother, the narrator's father was always happy to answer any queries. She also discovers sketches that she and her brother had created. This demonstrates how completely different the narrator's and her brother's personalities were. While her drawings depicted happy scenes with everyone getting along, her brother's works featured military themes like tanks, planes, and swastikas, as well as horrific depictions of nature.

The narrator also examines her father's papers and finds some kind of signatures. For a brief moment she believes that her father might have gone insane, but also realizes that the signatures might be an indication to her father's whereabouts. She recognizes the scribbles to be oils on a precipice hard. The narrator goes on a hunt to the precipice with the stopgap of chancing some answers and dives into the lake. Her plan to go to the precipice becomes one of the crucial events in her revitalization trip. After diving into water she sees a figure with branches below and she says "it was commodity I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead" (Atwood 136). As it turns out, the narrator has been lying throughout the novel. The narrator sex-husband was actually her art professor who was married. They had an affair and the narrator got pregnant. Still, the professor forced her to have a revocation, which caused the narrator's trauma.

However, the narrator experienced anguish when the professor had her have an abortion. Upon Surfacing, the main character starts to recognize her own involvement in the abortion: "I killed whatever it was, whether it was a part of me or something else entirely." Although it wasn't a child, I didn't let it be one (Atwood 1979: 137). Her overwhelming regret suggests that she believes she has failed as a mother. She feels a great deal of remorse over not being able to protect her child while giving delivery. The narrator learns that she has been angry of the professor since he put pressure on her, even if she still feels like a victim.

The narrator wants a child with Joe in order to ask the child she was unable to conceive for forgiveness after realizing what actually happened to her. She wants to do things correctly and on to her own terms this time. She uses Joe to get pregnant in order to accomplish that, and she then makes plans for her escape in order to raise the child in the manner that she feels is proper. The narrator also wants it to remain a secret because she thinks that if anyone knew, they would make her have another abortion. That is not going to happen to her. Her anguish demonstrates the depth of her trauma since she fears that anyone.

To raise her child independently and according to her own standards, she is prepared to abandon everything and flee. She is traumatized by the machines and the coldness that were present during her abortion, so this time she wants to give birth alone and as organically as possible. In the mind of the narrator: "The baby slips out easily like an egg, a kitten, and I'll lick him and bite the rope, I'll never teach him words" (Atwood 1979: 156). This line shows how his mind changes; she seems to imagine living on her own with her baby like animals, which could be a

sign of the beginning of her rebirth journey.

The real transformation of the narrator begins when she hears about the death of her father and does not come on the boat with Joe, David and Anna and ends up alone on the island. Annis Pratt describes this stage by saying that “fictional heroes often experience a chaos of surreal images and symbols during this stage” (Pratt 1981: 144).

At this point, the narrator no longer has to hold back her emotions. She cries for the first time since the traumatic experience. She also expresses her bitterness and anger towards her parents, blaming them for their deaths. She believes that her parents had the opportunity to stay and not leave her wondering who will take care of her. The narrator then decides to go on an adventure and try to meet her dead parents. The narrator realizes that she can only meet her parents if she changes. Instead of being visited by her parents, she must visit them, and this requires her to become closer to nature and less human. She looks at himself in the mirror and feels that the mirror catches her. She refers to Anna who constantly used a mirror to make sure her appearance was perfect. She turns the mirror to be free and “Not to see herself, but to be seen” (Atwood 1979: 169). To do this, she decides to destroy all man-made physical objects in the house and free herself by living outside like animals. She seems to see horror in man-made objects, which prevents her from being truly free at 19 years old. The only thing she takes with her is a blanket because she says she needs it “until the fur grows” (Atwood 1979: 171). The main character then goes to the lake and washes, which can be seen as a symbolic cleansing. Having renounced all human activity, she must also purify her body to be truly free. She says, “When I am clean, I rise from the lake and leave my false body floating on the surface” (Atwood 1979: 172).

Narrator’s mind also reflects her evolution into an animal. She eats only what is found in the desert, food in cans and jars is not allowed. When she tries to bite through the beet, she realizes that her teeth cannot penetrate the skin. According to the narrator, she’s not strong enough yet, which means she’ll get better with time. At first she eats food grown in the garden of her father’s home, but soon realizes that the garden is not entirely natural either. Despite her hunger, she refuses to pick food from the garden because she believes it is against the rules and against her parents’ wishes. She even refuses to wash the plants she finds and notices some mushrooms that seem to have a psychedelic effect after the narrator eats them. As a result, the narrator has a hallucinatory experience through which she finally feels truly immersed in nature. She is no longer in touch with her human self; she seems to think of herself as a being that embodies various forms of nature. She also no longer feels the need to use language, as animals do not, and then she thinks: “Why speak when you are a word” (Atwood 1979: 175). It is clear that the images she sees and the feelings she experiences are surreal and illogical, a process of transformation. “She defies grammar and punctuation conventions as she becomes one with nature. She no longer believes that language is essential to existence.” (Petrilli, 2007, p. 47). When people come looking for her on the island, she decides to seek refuge in nature, because at this

moment she has completely distanced herself from people and immersed herself in nature.

The narrator finally meets the spirit of her mother. She sees her mother eating a jay near the cabin, just as she always remembered her. Although she remembers her mother as a caring woman and feeding her is one of her fondest memories, the narrator is terrified of the figure and the figure senses it. The next day, she also encounters her father’s ghost, and the two encounters are similar in nature. She sees her father becoming something else, “what you get when you’ve been here alone too long” (Atwood 1979: 180-181); the narrator compares him to a wolf, but she is not afraid. She then realizes that the figure is not her father, because she is dead, but rather that her father has become part of nature, just as she thought her mother’s spirit lived in the desert.

The narrator comes to terms with the fact that her parents are dead, so she no longer feels the need to follow the rules she made up and returns to the cabin. She eats a can of beans because she feels the need to survive because she owes it to her parents. In the end, she accepts that her parents were only human and did their best to provide and protect their children. They both had positive and negative traits, and most importantly, both had more strengths than weaknesses. She blamed her mother for her death and leaving her alone, and also her father’s social estrangement because they lived on a remote island at his will. Now, however, she sees objectively and appreciates the contribution of her parents to raise and shape her.

Now she sees her mother as a strong woman who has adapted to life in the cramped conditions of the city. Her parents did not tell her anything about the Second World War, which was happening at the time, and her mother did her best to photograph her children, hoping to forget the war and the isolation. Her father brought them to the island to protect them, and she realizes that trying to maintain the illusion that all is well and their lives in order must have taken a toll on him. The narrator also realizes that’s she was not the only victim stranded on the island; her whole family was in the same situation. Now she comes to the conclusion that not all Americans are bad and Canadians can have bad intentions too. This is a good example of the change in her way of thinking, because before her thinking was based on duality, now she begins to see that there can be more than two sides and she can think about things from different perspectives.

Narrator’s own journey appears to be mirrored in the scene where she watches the fish and it seems to take on several representations of itself-all of which must necessarily be human inventions. Despite having taken on numerous shapes, this fish ultimately stays or transforms back into a fish. She has also undergone numerous transformations before returning to her previous state as a regular person. She seemed to be prepared to return to civilization at this time. She states on page 185, “The word games, the winning and losing games are finished,” and in the end, she finds a cause to live: her new baby. “If I die, it dies”. She understands that every child represents a fresh chance for humanity, thus she sees her pregnancy as a new opportunity.

The narrator finally realizes that she cannot stay on the island because she will run out of food and freeze, and the only way to survive is to return to the city. She then turns the mirror again and sees that the creature looking at her is not an animal. The adjustment of the narrator to the death of her parents, her acceptance of other views, and the fact that she is only human indicates that her metamorphosis is complete. After her metamorphosis, the narrator's first words are: "Above all, refuse to be a victim if I don't, I can't do anything" (Atwood 1979: 185). Narrator left her victim mentality and feels empowered. Living alone in nature, the protagonist has discovered her true self. This aligns with the beliefs of Sherill E. Grace (1983: 10) who felt that one must be completely surrounded by nature to rediscover oneself and Davey (1984: 121) who asserted that nature fostered the protagonist's transformation.

CONCLUSION

Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* presents a world where society is defined by men and men use their power to control women. As a result, women have lost touch with their true selves and are seen as passive victims. A woman must find her voice in a patriarchal world to reconnect with her true self. Even today many women's voices are silenced and that is why the novel is relevant in today's world. *Surfacing* is an example of a woman's struggle in society and her journey to find her true identity through transformation. The novel *Surfacing* explores the transformation of a socially marginalized woman who resents society, her actions fueled by guilt and anger from a traumatic abortion. Feeling abandoned by her parents, she creates a new reality where she sees herself as a powerless victim, disconnected from others.

Unnamed narrator gradually starts to see during her metamorphosis that her perspective on life is incorrect and that she needs to embrace the past and show consideration for other people in order to survive. With the aid of nature, the main character embraces other viewpoints and stops categorizing society and the universe as either good or evil. Her willingness to reintegrate into society and her refusal to view herself as a victim are the key effects of her metamorphosis. She contemplates returning to society, but it would still present issues because society has not changed along with her. She understands that it is still male-defined and that it would be difficult for her to reenter because there is a scope that society would not be willing to adopt her and her new status of mind.

Surfacing, according to Rigney (1987: 114–115), demonstrates that the protagonist triumphs and escapes unharmed. The protagonist is ultimately victorious, but that does not mean she is unaffected by her past experiences; rather, it simply means that she has come to terms with it and has chosen not to allow it to continue to define her life. Nevertheless, the novel demonstrates how a woman may overcome adversity and serve as an inspiring role model for other women. The book's conclusion is ultimately successful even if no one can predict if the protagonist would eventually integrate into society. The narrator, who was resentful and cold towards the society and other people, transforms into an empowered woman who

refuses to feel inferior. She finds her true identity and her self-worth and emerges from her quest as a victor instead of a victim.

Even if the protagonist ultimately triumphs, her prior experiences have still hurt her, and just because she has come to terms with the past and stopped allowing it to define her present doesn't imply that her wounds have healed. However, the book demonstrates that a woman may overcome adversity and inspire other women by setting a positive example. It seems like the changed human hero appears to be giving her blessing of strength to the woman reader rather than to any other person in the 'Surfacing'.

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